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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 001849

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PARM](#) [BA](#) [IR](#) [REGION](#) [BILAT](#) [OFFICIALS](#)  
SUBJECT: KING HAMAD SUPPORTS GULF SECURITY DIALOGUE

REF: STATE 171822

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (S) King Hamad October 18 told the interagency Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) delegation that he wants to work with the U.S. on creating a new comprehensive defense strategy for the region in light of recent developments. He commended the U.S.'s bilateral approach to each of the GCC states and said the GCC should solve its internal disputes and send Iran the message that it is united. He complained that Qatar is becoming an "Iranian satellite" and that Oman's lack of urgency about the Iranian challenge is because "it is not on Iran's list - for now." The King stated that the Iranian people hate living under the regime and that although the government sounds strong, it is vulnerable. On Iraq, the King said that Iraqis would be too scared to fight each other if U.S. forces pulled back. He stressed that Bahrain wants real peace with Israel and was in touch with the Israeli and Palestinian governments about moving ahead. Referring to Bahrain's upcoming elections, the King said that Bahrain has a "responsible democracy" with safeguards in place to guard against the more extreme elements of the political spectrum. He stated that there would be a woman in the elected lower house of parliament for the first time as one woman was running unopposed. End Summary.

¶2. (S) The interagency Gulf Security Dialogue delegation led by Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs John Hillen and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Peter Rodman met with King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa October 18 to discuss achieving progress on the six pillars of the Dialogue (reftel). The delegation also met with Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Assistant Under Secretary for Coordination and Follow Up Shaikh Abdul Aziz

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bin Mubarak Al Khalifa (septels).

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Work Together on New Defense Strategy  
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¶3. (S) King Hamad opened the meeting by saying that the region was in need of a new defense strategy. With all the recent events, there needed to be a comprehensive evaluation of internal and external security strategies. He thanked the delegation for coming to Bahrain and asked that the United

States work with Bahrain and the GCC on this new concept. He emphasized that there should be more engagement and more exercises to improve coordination and to send the right message to regional actors. "We are honored to be your ally," the King stated, "and we have a wonderful relationship." He said he had reviewed the GSD read-ahead paper and he wants to work on it together and achieve its objectives.

14. (S) The King commended the delegation's engagement with all GCC countries, noting that bilateral approaches with the GCC countries were most appropriate at this point. Internally, each GCC country is different and is able to engage in a different way. The GCC countries should "forget their disputes and accept what they have, which is a lot," the King commented, noting that the region would become more secure if the GCC settled its internal quarrels. When discussing any problem, Iran should see that the GCC is united. Oil is pouring from the region to the world and it is important that no single country controls the Gulf's petroleum resources, like Saddam tried to do and now Iran is attempting to do the same.

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Concerns About Qatar, Oman  
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15. (S) In this regard, King Hamad commented that Qatar is "becoming like an Iranian satellite." Qatar Airlines has more than 80 Iranian pilots, the hospitals are staffed with Iranian doctors, and Qatar established a special port facility for Iranian imports. Qatar "is being bought by Iran" as it drifts away from Saudi Arabia. He urged that the U.S. mediate between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and stated that Qatar should become involved in the GSD process. A/S Hillen

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said that the U.S. side had met with Qatar on the GSD and shared some "hard words." He told Qatari officials that the changing security architecture in the region is based upon a commonality of interests between the U.S. and its friends in the region to stop Iran from achieving dominance. Qatar's votes in the UN Security Council and Arab League had led the U.S. to question whether that was still true.

16. (S) A/S Hillen indicated that in the delegation's meetings in Muscat, Omani officials had been casual about Iran and the prospect of proliferation in the region. The King joked that Iran must have told Oman that "it's not on their list - for now." Iran's priorities are Bahrain, the UAE, and Kuwait, he said. Iran cannot move against Bahrain because of the presence of the Fifth Fleet. He noted that he had spoken with leaders in Dubai about smuggling into Iran, and what would happen to Dubai's trade with Iran if sanctions were applied. They acknowledged that there would be more smuggling. Dubai, the King said, is the biggest highway for goods into Iran.

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Iranian Government Vulnerable  
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17. (S) The King said that the Iranian people hate living under the current regime. The people in control are not popular. There are so many different kinds of people in the country - Balouchis, Turkomen, Azeris, Arabs, and others - but there is not one Sunni mosque in the country. The Iranian government sounds strong but it is not; it is vulnerable. A/S Hillen stated that Iran wants to dominate the region and speak for the Middle East. We want our friends to be able to pursue their interests and conduct their diplomacy in freedom.

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Strong, United Iraq to Face Iran  
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¶8. (S) The King said that there needs to be balance in the Gulf. When Saddam was removed from power, Iraqi officials invited Iran in while the Arab states did not move. The best way to deal with Iran is to have a strong, united Iraq. If the Iraqi government does not succeed, this would be an Iraqi failure, not a U.S. failure. Iraqis missed a great opportunity to work with the U.S. to create a modern country.

But they want to kill each other more than they want to modernize. If U.S. forces in Iraq pulled back, the various factions will be too scared to fight each other, he said, whereas with the U.S. presence, they are free to fight. "The sophisticated U.S. soldier," the King stated, "should not be patrolling the streets of Baghdad." He thought that the Arab countries could do more to bring security to Iraq, suggesting that they protect oil facilities. Noting that Bahrain had deployed a ship to Kuwait during the war, he said, "now we want to do more."

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Real Peace with Israel  
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¶9. (S) The King said that Bahrain should have real peace with Israel. "We're serious, pushing, meeting with Israelis," he asserted. While the meetings were not conducted openly, Bahrain would do so when the right time comes. The region needs peace with Israel "and then we can all face Iran," he stated. In the meetings, Bahrain tells Israel that the Palestinians are under occupation and have a long way to go for a Palestinian state. Israel should assist the Palestinians. Hamas, Hizballah, and Iran do not want peace. America must support peace and provide diplomatic leadership. A/S Hillen said that Secretary Rice is engaging and wants to be seen as providing that leadership. The King noted that Bahrain is working with Palestinian President Abbas, telling him not to worry about Hamas and to do what he needs to do. The Arabs support him.

¶10. (S) The King said that he had visited Damascus a few months ago and had sent Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa there recently. He told President Asad "politely" that Syria is a dictatorship without a dictator. Bashar just laughed. Asad said that he could "solve Iraq's problems" by sending Syrian forces into the country. The King said that Syria's intention would be to get the U.S. out and then work with Iran to occupy Iraq, just as they did in Lebanon.

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"Responsible Democracy" in Bahrain  
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¶11. (S) Turning to domestic affairs, the King indicated that Bahrain was busy preparing for elections. His challenge is to show citizens that Bahrain can be a better place in the future. The country needs a bigger middle class and stronger economic growth to achieve stability. He noted that there are both Sunni and Shia extremists in the country that threaten stability, and he said he had instructed the Ministry of Interior to consult with the FBI on what Bahrain can do better.

¶12. (S) Bahrain should become even more moderate than it was before, the King said. Bahrain has a "responsible democracy," unlike in Kuwait, where Salafis dominate. The appointed upper house Shura Council, he stated, balances the elected lower house Council of Representatives (COR), a "safe" arrangement. If Bahrain's democracy was like Kuwait's or Morocco's, "the Salafis and Jihadis would come in." Addressing the former boycotters, the King said that he had been patient and had not called them traitors. "I spoke with them and kept doors open." This time they will participate in the elections. He noted there would be a woman deputy in

the COR for the first time. "We designed a constituency for her," he said, and she had no competition for the seat. She ran in 2002 and almost won, getting 45 percent of the votes. Her participation in the COR is good for Bahrain, the King stated.

¶13. (S) The King mentioned that the Bandar report had added some controversy to the pre-election period. He said that the author, Sudanese-British citizen Salah Al Bandar, had links to exiled Bahraini rejectionist Saeed Shehabi in London. When the Shia boycotters decided to participate, Shehabi lost, so he decided to inject Al Bandar into the system. Al Bandar had claimed he was an NGO expert. Because he has a Bahraini wife, "we decided to help him." What Al Bandar did, however, was look at statistics and checks, listened to some people, and drew wrong conclusions. Action on the issue had moved from the press to the courts.

¶14. (U) A/S Hillen and A/S Rodman cleared this cable.

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